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A HOARD OF LATER KUSHAN COPPER COINS
FROM BAMBORE

It was when I travelled with Professor Gregory Bongard-Levin in Central Asia after the 1968 international conference at Dushanbe on the History, Archaeology and Culture of Central Asia in the Kushan period that I came to recognize the problems stemming from the hoards and finds of late Kushan copper coins throughout the Kushan Empire. It is therefore particularly appropriate that I should offer this paper in his honour - about a large hoard of later Kushan copper coins from Bambore near Karachi in Pakistan - as a mark of our long friendship and common academic interests.

The 1973 hoard of later Kushan copper coins of the ARDOXSHO type

During the spring of 1974, one of the antique dealers in Karachi, Pakistan was offering for sale a large number of late Kushan copper coins - probably some 10,000 (although it was not possible to count them) in a large sack. He was not able to give much information about the hoard, except to say that a large number of copper coins with the same obverse and reverse types had been found ten km. west of the ancient town of Bambore. No farther details were forthcoming about the circumstances of the find or its precise

location. The site of Bambore lies in the Indus Delta on the north bank of the Gharo Creek, near the Karachi-Hyderabad Railway some 65 km east of Karachi. It was an important port in antiquity, connected at that period with the interior by a branch of the Indus. The Gharo Creek once formed the western branch of the River Indus which became silted up and the main river now flows past Thatta 40 km to the east. Bambore is well known as an early Islamic site and harbour town; but the excavations of the Pakistan Department of Archaeology since 1958 have revealed the remains of three distinct periods - the Scytho-Parthian, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic. Finds range from the 1st century BC to the 13th century AD. The vendor was willing to allow me to examine a sample of coins in the hoard and to photograph some typical examples, which I illustrate here (Plate 1).

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1. Obv. King standing left, sacrificing at an altar | 6.77 gm. |
| Rev. Enthroned Ardoxsho seated to left. | |
| 2. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 7.11 gm. |
| 3. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 7.40 gm. |
| 4. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 5.82 gm. |
| 5. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 7.74 gm. |
| 6. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 7.82 gm. |
| 7. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 6.56 gm. |
| 8. Obv. and Rev. as 1. | 7.07 gm. |

All the coins have the same obverse type of the Kushan king, nimbate, standing to the left, sacrificing at a small altar. The figure of the King is much cruder than on the obverse of the coins of the preceding kings of the Great Kushans. The coins in the hoard all have the same reverse type, a seated figure of the goddess Ardoxsho enthroned, holding a *cornucopiae*. This is the type attributed by Russian scholars such as E.V.Zeymal to Kanishka III, a ruler in the later Kushan empire after Vasudeva II in the third century AD or later. Copper coins of these types usually have no legible king's

name on the obverse. There are however sometimes traces of a legend - letters retaining traces of royal titulature on the obverse and elements of the goddess' name APDOXSHO on the reverse (as on coins some from the Bambore hoard). It is from the legends on contemporary gold staters with the same obverse and reverse types that this whole series of copper coins is attributed to a king called «Kanishka».

As with other copper coins with the Ardoxsho reverse, many of the flans of the coins in the Bambore hoard are rubbed and have suffered substantial loss of weight from circulation. But the really striking feature about these coins from the Bambore hoard is the irregular shape of many of the flans. This a common feature to be seen on many of the coins of the Ardoxsho type. There can be no doubt that the moneyers of the period are re-using the larger and heavier flans of earlier Kushan coinages, presumably after the weight (and size) of the coinage has been deliberately reduced. The denomination from which these Ardoxsho coins have been cut to a reduced size is to be seen from the later Kushan copper coins of the Shiva and the bull and the Ardoxsho types represented in the 1946 Begram Excavations hoard.

The 1946 Begram Excavations Hoard

In October 1946 a hoard of 65 late Kushan copper coins was found at Begram during Ghirshman's excavations for the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan. It consisted of 61 copper coins of the enthroned Ardoxsho type (the only type represented in the Bambore hoard) and four coins of the earlier and heavier Shiva and the bull reverse type usually attributed to Vasudeva II. The coins were:

(a) Shiva and the bull type (4 coins) (Plate 2a).

Obv. King standing to left, sacrificing at an altar.

Rev. Shiva standing facing. Indian humped

7.4, 8.6, 8.4, 8.9 gm.

(b) Enthroned Ardoxsho type (61 coins) (Plate 2b).

Obv. King standing to left, sacrificing at an altar.

Rev. Ardoxsho seated, facing, on throne, holding a cornucopia in her left arm.

7.8, 8.7, 7.4, 7.3, 8.5, 9.0, 8.0, 7.0, 6.3, 5.8,

7.2, 7.9, 8.7, 7.8, 6.7, 7.5, 6.2, 8.1, 5.7, 7.4,

5.9, 7.8, 7.3, 7.4, 5.3, 7.2, 6.0, 7.1, 7.5, 5.2,

8.3, 7.3, 7.1, 5.8, 7.3, 6.3, 7.2, 7.8, 6.7, 6.7,

7.2, 7.0, 7.7, 5.6, 7.0, 6.4, 8.0, 5.7, 6.8, 7.6,

7.5, 6.5, 6.5, 6.6, 6.9, 7.0, 7.3, 6.4, 6.8, 6.7, 6.1 gm.

The Shiva/Nandi coppers were originally struck to a weight standard of some 10 to 11 gm., but the four coins of this type in the Begram hoard only weigh 8 to 9gm, which is no more than the heavier of the Ardoxsho type coins in the hoard. This is presumably because, having lost weight through wear, their weight now was not out of line with the weight of the later and current Ardoxsho coppers in the Begram hoard. To reach this weight, two of the four Shiva/Nandi coppers have been deliberately cut at the edge of the flan to reduce the amount of copper they contain.

The Later Kushan Empire

Göbl, from his analysis of the Kushan gold coinages, claims «it is now clear from my investigations that after the death of Vasudeva I the Kushan Empire broke up at first into two parts, whose sovereigns were in competition or at war. The western kingdom with its centre at Kabul or Kapisa was held by Vasudeva II, the eastern part with a centre in Gandhara and western Punjab, which at least at the beginning of the breakdown, was Peshawar, was held by Kanishka II, whose coinage can now be defined clearly. The west adopted the Shiva/bull type, the east that of enthroned Ardoxsho».

In view of his hypothesis Göbl is naturally puzzled by the occurrence of both types of copper coins of the later Kushans in the site finds from the excavations at Butkara I in Swat (Pakistan),

which should lie firmly in the Ardoxsho territory. He is forced to conclude that coins from both sides of the rival kingdoms infiltrated into the Swat valley, «but at present the evidence gives no wholly clear account as to what part of the divided Kushan empire Swat belonged».

It is however not only at Butkara I that late Kushan copper coins of both the Ardoxsho and the Shiva and the bull reverse types are found together in substantial numbers. Zeymal has made it very clear that both reverse types occur in substantial numbers in finds from Tadjikistan and the position is similar in coin finds from a series of excavated sites such as Surkh Kotal, Delbarjin Tepe, Begram, Hadda and Mathura.

The evidence from the Bambore and Begram hoards suggest a very different explanation from the one proffered by Göbl. Once we exclude the crude light weight imitations of the Shiva and the bull type, we see that the difference between the Shiva and the bull and the Ardoxsho types in the late Kushan copper coins is not geographical, as Göbl, assumed, but chronological. The Ardoxsho type follows the heavier Shiva and the bull type in the Bambore and Begram hoards. And the pattern is repeated when the metrology of the coins from excavations is studied at Swat and elsewhere. The hoards from Bambore and Begram show that with the introduction of the Ardoxsho type in the copper coinage of the later Kushans, the weight of the standard copper denomination was deliberately reduced and the flans of earlier issues were deliberately cut to reduce the copper content and weight of the Ardoxsho issues, even though the new Ardoxsho coinage was issued in some curiously angular shapes.

In antiquity, as in more recent times, most currencies suffer from some degree of inflation. As the value of the standard denomination falls, the value of the metal content of its coinage is reduced. This is the pattern that we witness in the gold and copper coinages of the later Kushans. There is a progressive reduction in the purity of the gold in the standard denomination and there is a parallel in the *al marco* weight standard to which the copper denominations are struck. In the later Kushan coppers, the major

stages in this process are marked by the introduction of a new reverse type. When we recognize this process, we have an important tool which we can use to establish the sequence of issues in this period. Even more interesting, perhaps, when we see that the distinction between the Shiva and the Ardoxsho types is chronological and that the Shiva and Ardoxsho types are both used in both the northern and southern provinces of the empire of the Kushans, we must re-examine and question any theory that postulates a major and permanent split in the empire after Vasudeva I.

Table I Weights of later Kushan copper coins from hoards
Bambore 1973 hoard

gm.	Shiva	Ardoxsho
10		
9		
8		xx
7		xxxxx
6		x

Begram 1946 excavations hoard

gm.	Shiva	Ardoxsho
10		
9	xx	xxxxx
8	x	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
7	x	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
6		xxxxxxxxxxxx
5		xx

Weights of Late Kushan copper coins from excavations

Surkh Kotal

gm.	Shiva	Ardoxsho	crude Shiva
10	x		
9	xxx		
8	xxxxxx	xxxx	
7	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxxxxx	x
6	xxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxx	xx
5	x	xxxx	xxxxxx
4		x	xxxxx
3			xxxxx
2			xxxxxxxx

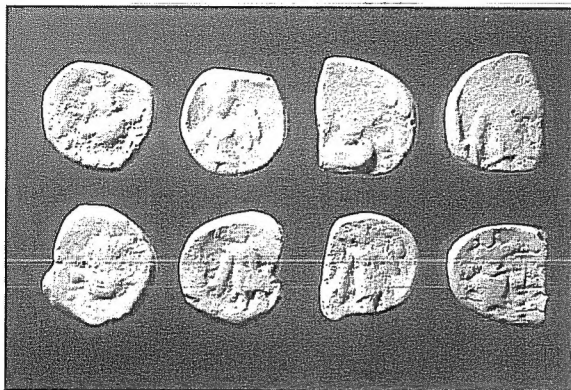
Butkara I excavations

gm.			
10	x		
9	xxxxxx		
8	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxx	
7	xxx	xxxxxxx	x
6	x	xxx	x
5		xx	xxxx
4		x	xxxxxxx
3			
2			

* * *

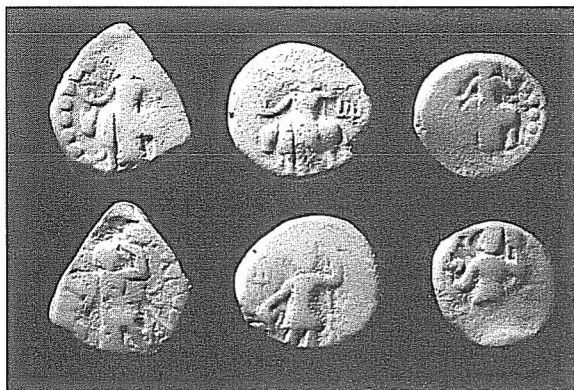
I am very grateful to Professor R. Ghirshman and the authorities of the Kabul Museum for permission to study the 1946 hoard from the Begram excavations in 1972. The weights of coins from the Butkara excavations in Table II are taken from Robert Göbl, *A Catalogue of Coins from Butkara I (Swat, Pakistan)*, ISMEO Reports and Memoirs Volume IV, Rome 1976, where Prof. Göbl discusses his interpretation of these coinages. The weights of coins from the Surkh Kotal excavations are taken from Gérard Fussman and Oliver Guillaume, *Surkh Kotal en Bactriane, Volume II Les Monnaies - Les Petits Objects MDFAA*, Tome XXXII, Paris 1990.

Fig. 1 - Coins from the 1973 Bambore Hoard

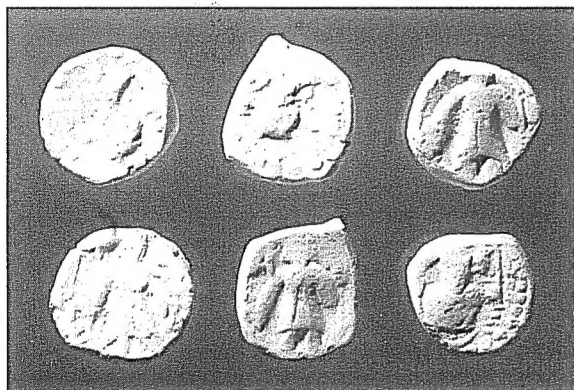


All with the Ardoxsho reverse.

Fig. 2 - Coins from the 1946 Begram excavations Hoard



(a) with Shiva and the bull reverse.



(b) with the Ardoxsho reverse.

